

1-21-09

Carole Davis  
Co-Executive Secretary of the Dietary Guidelines Advisory Committee  
Center for Nutrition Policy and Promotion  
USDA, Department of Agriculture  
3101 Park Center Drive, Room 1034  
Alexandria, VA 22302

Dear Ms. Davis:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments on the consumption of alcohol beverage products, as the Dietary Guidelines committee works toward the release of the 2010 *Dietary Guidelines for Americans*. Since 1980 these guidelines have been important to presenting science-based nutrition education to consumers – and certainly to serving as the basis for Federal nutrition policies and nutrition education programs and messages. Every revision – six times since 1980 – has appropriately included guidance about beverage alcohol. Since alcohol beverage products are part of the American diet, these messages should continue to be part of the next Dietary Guidelines 2010 revision.

As a registered dietitian, health professional, and author of many science-based nutrition books for the public and school textbooks, I support the importance of providing sound, practical guidance and information about beverage alcohol consumption.

Over the past six editions some dietary guidance statements have been substantially revised and edited as nutrition science has evolved (e.g., fat, grains, etc). In this same time period, the dietary guideline statement for beverage alcohol has remained essentially unchanged except for altering the wording from "alcohol" to "alcoholic beverages." And over time, the supporting messages regarding the potential health risks and benefits of beverage alcohol have become more specific and tailored. Yet, the definition of "moderate" drinking for men and women (1-2 drinks per day) and the definition of a standard drink have remained the same since they were first introduced more than 20 years ago. Tools and/or guidance to communicate the alcohol guideline have not been adequately updated and clarified to improve consumer compliance.

The 2005 *Dietary Guidelines for Americans* offers evidence-based guidance that is helpful to dietitians, doctors and other health professionals. This information helps health professionals provide patients--and consumers with guidance about beverage alcohol. The alcohol guideline advises consumers who choose to drink to do so in moderation. The *Guidelines* define moderation as up to two drinks a day for men and up to one drink a day for women. In addition, the *Guidelines* define a drink as 12 fluid ounces of regular beer, 5 fluid ounces of wine and 1.5 ounces of distilled spirits. Each standard drink contains 0.6 fluid ounces of alcohol.

As you look toward the 2010 revision, the *Guidelines* must continue to educate individuals about what makes a standard alcoholic beverage drink so that adults who choose to drink, can do so in moderation and responsibly. Communicating about standard drinks will help consumers know how to follow the alcohol guideline in the Dietary Guidelines. The following definition would provide the clearest information to help consumers understand and make responsible choices about beverage alcohol.

"A standard drink consists of:

- 12 fluid ounces of regular beer (5 percent alcohol)
- 5 fluid ounces of wine
- 1.5 fluid ounces of 80-proof distilled spirits (40 percent alcohol).

Each standard drink contains 0.6 fluid ounces of alcohol."

As a nutrition educator, I recognize that moderate beverage alcohol consumption, as defined by Dietary Guidelines, needs to address both caloric and health perspectives. Because of the impact on health, this topic must be addressed by health professionals and certainly in the Dietary Guidelines. Ultimately, as the topic of beverage alcohol is explored by health practitioners and their audiences and/or patients, awareness and knowledge of their potential benefits and harms will grow. Behavior change and appropriate intervention, when needed, may then follow.

Thank you again for the opportunity to comment on the dietary guidance as it relates to intake of beverage alcohol.

Sincerely,

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